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THE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL FROM EASTERN EUROPE:
A MOVE IN CRISIS

BY

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

THE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL FROM EASTERN EUROPE: A MOVE IN CRISIS

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will survey the massive return of the Soviet armed forces from Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union. Calling upon official sources during 1990, the paper discusses why the removal began, the immenseness of the troop removal, and the political, economic, social, and ecological implications of this momentous transition.

Many sources cite the alarming lack of housing available within the Soviet Union to accommodate the returning military and indicate how officials are coping with the housing problem. This study focuses on Soviet military construction units because they are often discussed as a possible solution. Ironically, they are also often disparaged as being of little usefulness due to numerous internal organizational problems.

To better understand the impact of the return, the entire atmosphere within the Soviet Union is also surveyed. Problems within the Soviet military, attitudes of Soviet citizens, brutal living conditions experienced in the military, leadership problems, and a lack of draftees all impact upon the return of the Soviet military.

The paper also reviews some of the particular circumstances involved with removing Soviet soldiers from Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, and Poland. It concludes with cautious predictions for the future.

Setting The Stage

As the Cold War of the last forty-five years comes to a close, American officials are now planning a strategy for the return of U.S. soldiers from Western Europe. We look forward to removing about 40,000 of our nearly 350,000 troops in Europe next year. Perhaps more will be relocated to support operations in the desert of Saudi Arabia. Everywhere we are witnessing similar changes as a result of President Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of "new thinking."

If the United States won the Cold War and the Soviet Union lost it, the Soviets will have one thing in common with their previous adversaries. We can be assured that there will be no victory parades and adulation as U.S. soldiers begin to arrive back in America. Likewise, there will be little celebration for those in the Soviet military who served in Eastern Europe. But "little" may well be an understatement! The magnitude of the task of removing so many soldiers in the current Soviet environment of limited resources and a bankrupt economy is immense. Restationing agreements may, in fact, mean little if

the wherewithal does not exist to return the forces to adequate facilities in the USSR.

When President Gorbachev announced unilateral troop reductions at the United Nations in December 1988, he signalled his genuine desire to move away from the decades-old maintenance and commitment of massive Soviet conventional forces. These forces exceeded the requirements of defense alone. Indeed, Soviet forces could be decisive in a conventional war in Europe. At times it seemed that only the United States' nuclear capabilities prevented the Soviets from imposing their will in an almost uncontested fashion.

Then recently came the stunning Soviet announcement: The USSR would unilaterally cut their armed forces by 500,000 men, 10,000 tanks, 8,500 artillery systems, and 820 combat aircraft. Thus, a new era began, inaugurated by Gorbachev's doctrine of defense and the principle of sufficiency.¹

There was more. In 1989 the Soviets unilaterally withdrew 500 tactical nuclear warheads, and they seemed prepared to go further. According to Defense Minister Yazov, the Soviet Union would remove all nuclear munitions from their allies' territory — given a similar step on the part of the United States.²

Hard-line Soviet officials were upset. According to Defense Minister Yazov, some felt "our initiatives and bold decisions (were seen as) concessions to the West." Some

apparently hoped their leaders would lose face in the humiliation of the Cold War defeat.³

Nonetheless, the reductions have begun. The rapid collapse of the Warsaw Pact organization now reveals how insubstantial it was. For decades the "closed fist" of the Pact had galvanized NATO into action. Yet, the Warsaw Pact "safety belt" was probably more of an illusion in view of how often it had to be bolstered through the threat or use of military force: the GDR in 1953, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland in 1980. The Pact was held together despite the presence of a time bomb deeply embedded in the alliance.⁴

The "safety belt" of Eastern Europe presented its own interesting dynamics. Germany, after all, had been the source of two great wars: its partitioning and occupation seemed essential after World War II. Hungary did not even border on any of the NATO countries. In Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Bulgaria, 45 years of Soviet domination changed the attitudes of the citizens: the Soviets were no longer a liberation army; they were an oppressive occupation army.⁵

President Gorbachev has increasingly recognized that the true "safety belt" passes through the Soviet Union. It is measured not so much by the number of divisions as by the country's economic, social, national, and political strength.⁶ His perspective of the realities of Europe as it embarks on the

21st century called for rapid change. The Vienna force reduction talks have taken on an unprecedented scope. A situation is emerging where neither side will ultimately be able to seriously threaten the other. The reduction of military capabilities sets the stage for a sharp increase in agreements about political, economic, social, and ecological issues that impact on the security of Europe.⁷

By June 1990, Soviet troop numbers in Eastern Europe had fallen by 300,000,⁸ and reports continue to detail the withdrawal of Soviet Forces. A typical report discusses the withdrawal from Czechoslovakia as of the end of July 1990: over 52,000 servicemen (or 65 percent of the total to be returned); over 900 tanks (some 58 per cent recalled); 900 artillery pieces (about 63 percent recalled); and 100 planes (some 72 percent returned). The staff of an army corps, an armored division and a motorized division with logistical support, an anti-aircraft rocket brigade, an anti-aircraft rocket regiment, two rocket brigades, two air regiments, and several battalions have now departed the country.⁹ Similar drawdowns are occurring in other Warsaw Pact countries.

These frequent reports, with their encouraging information about departing forces, arrive in the West in such volume that each report is like a rain drop in a shower. Each invites a picture of the moment that the shower will end, when clear and beautiful skies will prevail. For those in the Soviet

military, however, these are difficult times. They are not really in retreat. Nor is the Soviet war machine being wholly dismantled. Rather, it is in transition. The Soviet Army is still capable of a wide variety of military operations. Moreover, this transition is taking place at a time of crisis within the Soviet Union itself.

A July 1990 Izvestiya article depicts this situation vividly:

Our Army probably has no problem more acute than that of withdrawing troops from East European countries and stationing and accommodating 123,000 servicemen and more than 100,000 members of officers' and warrant officers' at home... The problem ... is a national one. It affects the interest of the peoples of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the regions where the troops are going... It is acute because it encounters the contradictions which are rife in society... 75,000 people in all have to be provided with housing... The worrying fact is that there is a constant lack of bricks, cement, ferroconcrete, and timber structures. There is no possibility of the military carrying out by itself the task of accommodating the troops and officers and warrant officers' families who are being withdrawn.¹⁰

The article goes on to detail a bureaucratic paralysis exacerbated by deteriorating political and economic conditions. It proposes that money be allocated exclusively to the Ministry of Defense in order to solve the problem of housing. It ends with a statement that "the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary and Czechoslovakia (is) a dress rehearsal for the

solution of other, bigger problems which will be encountered very soon when the Vienna talks on the reduction of forces and armaments in Europe are over."¹¹

A dress rehearsal: next, the Soviet Union plans to show the world how a superpower can lay down its arms and pick up the apparatus of a 21st century superpower. Hereafter, economic, political, and social power will all be commensurate with the Soviet Union's military power.

This military withdrawal from Eastern Europe is so dramatic, of such magnitude, that it needs to be considered from several perspectives. Of foremost importance, however, is the way it is affecting the lives, attitudes, morale, and professionalism of its own officers and men.

Problems In The Soviet Military

Attitudes

In an environment of political and economic uncertainty, the perceptions of Soviet citizens genuinely influence military attitudes. Despite the nature of the political system it serves, the military is never really separated from society. Fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and neighbors all have ways of influencing soldiers' views of their roles and missions.

In August 1990 an opinion poll covering ten regions of the Soviet Union surveyed about 1,000 persons. It asked the following questions:

1. Is there a threat of military attack against the USSR today? Sixty-eight percent said no.

2. Is there a need to change our country's funding of the arms and munitions industry? Fifty-six percent said it should be lowered.

3. Recently the Supreme Soviets in a number of republics passed decisions to the effect that their draftees must perform their military service solely on their territory. Do you approve of these decisions? Forty-seven percent approved and another twenty percent approved with certain limitations.

4. How happy are you with the state of affairs in the Soviet armed forces? Forty-two percent were a bit dissatisfied, and thirty-three percent were totally dissatisfied.

5. What do you believe primarily accounts for this unfavorable state? Forty-two percent stated low discipline and a lack of order in the army, while thirty-one percent mentioned the growth of non-official and criminal activities.

6. How should discussion of the army's problems proceed? Seventy percent said it should take place with widespread public discussion.

7. How do you view the attitudes of top military leaders, judging by their speeches at Party Congresses and the Congress of Peoples Deputies? Fifty-one percent were uncertain, while forty percent considered them conservative and backward.

8. What would be your attitude towards the proposal to set up, under public control, special inter-republic military formations (similar to United Nations "peace forces") to be used for the settlement of inter-ethnic conflicts on USSR territory? Fifty percent felt positive and twenty-nine percent were uncertain.¹²

Of the three major institutions that support Soviet authoritarian rule -- the Party, the police, and the army -- the army is the institution closest to the people. Many Soviet citizens have been schooled in the army barracks. However, for many citizens military service has damaging consequences. There is widespread concern with "hazing" inside the ranks, of growing violence and crime in the army and of the stupefying effect of army routine on young people. The majority of those who answered believed that the military leaders' conservatism is not shared by the majority of those in the army.¹³ Moreover, there is suspicion that the tendency of the army to rush to the scene of emergencies tends to foster mismanagement, inefficiency, and irresponsibility within the social systems set up to provide for the people.

Many in the military accuse the press of arousing bad feelings toward the army.¹⁴ Some newspapers are clearly anti-military. The publication Ogonek has been singled out as being particularly slanted, paying scant attention to the strengths, accomplishments, or virtues of the military. It even uses poetry in some of its issues:

Do you sense, dear reader, the 'image of the enemy?'
This is who has eaten the country out of house and home,
Here they are, the 'valiant legion!'... In a word, it is time
To get rid of the generals, and the army.¹⁵

Soldiers often sense disenfranchisement and fear recrimination. Those returning from Afghanistan and Azerbaijan¹⁶ have recently been joined by comrades serving in Eastern Europe to share their status.¹⁷ A career soldier can serve a full 30 years, retire, and return to his home only to have "gained" the status of a "bomzh" (vagrant without a fixed domicile).¹⁸

Many citizens believe that the military has spent the country into a disastrous economic condition. One report mentions that the military used R70 billion in 1989,¹⁹ while a Ministry of Defense representative has referred to military expenditures amounting to R120 billion,²⁰ Yet another quotes the figure as R200 billion,²¹ another R300 billion.²² Such divergent estimates of military expenditures suggest spending without controls or limitations. Resentment increased

following a recent promise to earmark R63 billion from military accounts to make consumer goods, but then only R13 billion was actually used.²³ Military spending seems to take place with few controls.

Poor Living Conditions

Nearly 200,000 military families lack adequate housing. What about the soldiers who are not entitled to live in apartments? Reports differ on the actual conditions. Most, like a May 1990 Krasnaya Zvezda article about the findings of a high official, have a similar sound: "I must say that they live very, very badly -- and that is putting it mildly."²⁴ There are reports of austere barracks where life resembles penal servitude; also, units billeted in tents without electricity, running water, or eating utensils.²⁵

If the conditions of the men are poor, the perception of the living conditions of senior generals offers a stark contrast. Numerous accounts mention funds spent to build large summer cottages for the generals. Some commentators wonder if these same generals would offer their dachas for the children returning from Eastern Europe. This scrutiny and satire from the press, however, seems to have fallen on deaf ears.²⁶

In The Ranks

"Dedovshchina" -- hazing! The newspapers are credited with bringing this repulsive form of harassment to public attention.²⁷ It is mentioned often in accounts of army life. Roughly speaking, it is a system which used to occur in Western military colleges -- a system designed to "mature" a young cadet from the status of a plebe to that of an upperclassman. The big difference is that senior servicemen -- those with longer service -- practice this on younger, newly-arrived soldiers. Further, it involves beatings and intimidation; allegedly it serves to enhance the status and comfort of those who enforce it.²⁸

Soldiers' families and draftees view hazing as an unnecessary cruelty that wantonly increases the misery and suffering of military service. Among recent examples of this inhumane practice are soldiers who have been victimized by barracks-level extortion or have been forced to serve as lackeys for someone more senior.²⁹ "Seniority" usually simply indicates that those practicing it have served six or more months of conscripted service than their victims.

In September 1990 the military was forced to pay an injured private R10,000 to compensate for such bullying. His story is probably typical: a sergeant beat the young serviceman during his initial compulsory term of service.

Perhaps the private failed to lift his foot high enough in formation, or perhaps his belt was pulled less tight than the prescribed norms for wearing the uniform. Zealous to carry out his duties, the sergeant delivered a long, frenzied beating. A craniocerebral injury resulted; it partially paralyzed the soldier and rendered him only partially able to speak. A life has been broken. Tens of thousands of accounts reveal widespread brutality, hazing, and physical punishments, often administered for little or no reason, in the Soviet Army.³⁰

The environment for service in the Soviet Army thus produces numerous accidents, fights, other acts of violence, and taunts on a daily basis in many units. In this atmosphere, no fewer than 15,000 deaths of soldiers have been reported in just the first four years of perestroika.³¹ This equals Soviet military casualties in Afghanistan during ten years of combat.³² Even more startling, sociologists' data indicates twenty percent of those deaths were suicides!³³ This remarkable number surely indicates just how difficult conditions of service are for the Soviet citizen performing conscripted duty in the Soviet military.

Leadership

Those officers at the very top of the military ranks

entered the service during the wartime years of World War II and watched their country undergo an enormous buildup. They dedicated their lives to the ideal that a large, strong military was an absolute necessity. Today, under perestroika, those same generals have become targets of distrust from the very citizens they supposedly protect. Some say that the thinking of these generals was shaped during the Brezhnev era of stagnation. Such critics claim the generals have lost touch with life, gotten too used to honors and adulation, and forgotten how to communicate with the soldiers. During perestroika these same generals have been invited to take their leave or else begin working in a new fashion.³⁴ Little wonder, then, that we hear numerous rumors of military coups.³⁵

For a number of reasons younger officers in particular are more disillusioned with their professional lives than senior officers. Many junior officers say that advancement in the military service requires not so much professionalism as membership in the Party and personal loyalty to the Party leadership.³⁶ Favoritism, which has taken deep root in the military, also impacts unfairly on career advancement.³⁷ Other officers mention that their duties stand in the way of receiving professional training necessary for promotion.

Prestige is yet another matter. Major General V. Marchenkov, a division commander, notes that "We have reached the point where officers are instructed to leave their work in

the evening dressed in civilian clothes."³⁸ Why? Consider the statistics in a recent Krasnaya Zvezda article: Soviet officers have become favorite targets for violent acts. Last year 85 officers were murdered; 42 of those were cases of premeditated murder. By mid-1990, 21 officers were victims of hooligan attacks, and 189 had received wounds and other injuries.³⁹

Speaking on Moscow television, another division commander summarized the hardships of Soviet military life:

This year, for example, I had about 30 young officers, aged between 28 and 30 years, resigning due to unwillingness to serve. Why did they leave? A bus driver works eight hours and earns about R500 a month. An officer is on duty detail between six to eight times a month. After duty, he has to prepare for study sessions. Running for fire practice at 0600 hours. No apartment. Our division alone has about 300 families without their own homes. Wives in the countryside rent tiny rooms lacking elementary amenities. The foodstuffs situation is bad. Husbands are away on duty for a month and even two months at a time. Living in tents while there. And how much does such an officer earn? About half as much as a bus driver.⁴⁰

Conditions may well be as bad or worse for warrant officers. Thousands of vacancies are currently reported among their ranks, and not enough applications are being submitted to fill the slots.⁴¹

Draftees

New draftees will fill the ranks of those who have gone before. Their future in the Soviet army does not seem bright. Today's draft takes place in an atmosphere of sharply increased anti-army pacifist sentiments and deteriorating inter-ethnic relations.

In 1989, 6,647 Soviet citizens evaded the regular draft, compared with 1,044 in 1988. The sixfold increase is particularly dramatic in the larger cities:

- Leningrad Military District (18 times greater than last year);
- Baltic Military District (24 times greater);
- Carpathian Military District (10 times greater);
- Kiev Military District (23 times greater);
- Turkestan Military District (3.5 times greater);
- Volga-Urals Military District (25 times greater).⁴²

Territorial law enforcement agencies take few steps to search for the draft-dodgers and rarely take criminal action against them. Of the 6,647 evaders last year, only 292 were brought to account!⁴³

Numerous medical indicators suggest that many younger Soviets are in very poor mental and physical condition.

There was a 29 percent increase in overall morbidity in 1988, compared with 1981, that confirms the reports. Another alarming fact is that, despite otherwise good physical health, 300,000 youngsters between 15 and 17 have been diagnosed as having psychological problems.⁴⁴

Several explanations are offered for the physical and mental problems of this generation of Soviet citizens: an increasing number of congenital mental or physical developmental defects; the unbridled growth of alcoholism and drug abuse; the absence of normal health and hygiene conditions in children's preschool establishments and schools; and inadequate physical education and sports activities for adolescents.⁴⁵

According to data from the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs, 212,000 crimes were committed by teenagers of draft and predraft age last year. Some 44,000 of this group will join the army in 1990.⁴⁶

The recruits of 1990 are said to be less humble than their predecessors.⁴⁷ They are described as spiritually weak. Some have belonged to "guerrilla organizations"⁴⁸ and are not likely to undergo reeducation merely by donning a uniform! Youngsters headed for military service are nervous and worried. Some commentators say they come from an environment of jangling

guitars, basement parties, intoxication, and foreign currency speculation.⁴⁹ According to many Soviet citizens, solutions to such problems will require radical measures.

Caught In The Middle -- Military Construction Units

Soviet army engineer units are confronting discipline problems in the military, a lack of draftees, poor civilian perceptions about military life, ethnic discord, economically inefficient ministry controls, a lack of adequate military housing, and various political power struggles.

One Soviet general asserts "One can constantly read about drug abuse, violence and denigrating treatment of recruits. However, the examples always come from the motley engineer units, while the exemplary elite units are not considered worth a story in the newspapers."⁵⁰ Western experts call these engineers "the new serfs!"

The Soviet Army has 501 military construction formations; they include a total of 329,000 people currently working on the construction of national economic facilities in the charge of 20 ministries or departments. They are used extremely inefficiently. Disregard for and indifference to the soldiers' basic needs has led to increased crime. In the first four months of 1990 alone, 37 people were killed in these units.⁵¹

A recent interview with a military construction unit commander reveals the organizational problems:

It's no secret that the recruits are allocated according to the 'what's-left-over-principle': that is to say the best workers go one place but the construction units get those with the records of convictions and those who are ill - both mentally and physically - and the boys do heavy work that is sometimes beyond their limits.⁵²

He added that "a principal (concern is) those with convictions... (also) many of the military construction people nowadays come from the Central Asian Republics and the Transcaucasus."⁵³

This sorting by background, aptitude, and ethnic origins begins a process that places many conscripts into virtual servitude.⁵⁴ The construction units are viewed by the various ministries as cheap labor. They operate on an economic accountability principle that measures efficiency. And their efficiency is considered poor.⁵⁵

The presence of military construction formations in civilian ministries and departments appears to contradict the USSR Constitution and law. Accordingly, a proposal was recently submitted to the parliament: By fall of 1990, no more Soviet Army draftees will be assigned to military construction units used in national economic projects. Further, by 1 January

1991, all Soviet Army units working on such projects will be disbanded. There would be a few exceptions, but even those excepted units would be disbanded before 1 January 1992.⁵⁶

These soldiers are caught between political powers. In a report from a recent meeting of the Supreme Soviet Committee for Defense and State Security, the effect of all this was pointed out: the USSR state planning committee has still not assigned quotas for military construction workers for next year; it is dragging its feet in tackling the question of transferring to the Defense Ministry budget 15 military construction detachments engaged in the national economy which have not yet started to work.⁵⁷

These construction units can be likened to pawns in a chess game: they are caught in a huge game that is nearly stalemated. The engineer units are cited constantly in Soviet reports that deal with every facet of the military, including the return of forces from East Europe. All indications are that these units are in trouble. They do not accomplish much for the army or the country.

Solutions

Switching to a professional army filled with volunteers will probably cost three times the personnel expense of today's Soviet military.⁵⁸ Another heavy manpower expense would be

allocation of adequate pay for disabled soldiers who have been injured in the line of duty.⁵⁹

In the short term, the problems with the draft can be lessened by reducing the active duty term to 18 months.⁶⁰ Also, leaders of the republics would have to be held criminally responsible for ensuring that the draft mechanism is carried out in their local regions.⁶¹

Those who lament that honor and dignity are essential⁶² to a military must zealously provide honor and dignity to even the most junior private in the ranks. Some Soviet analysts claim dignity would begin with allowing soldiers to express their complaints to public officials; — this would bond the military, local government, the soldier's family and the soldier.⁶³ Likewise, critics claim trade unions could be even more useful for the military.⁶⁴

Sociopolitical issues require skillful Soviet leaders trained to manage change. The political officers assigned to the units have taught Marxist-Leninist doctrine for years, but now they are accused of being out of touch. This same corps could be reestablished into rapid response ideological formations: public relations officers, sociologists, ethnographers, psychologists, and cultural specialists.⁶⁵ A final significant reform would provide the troops with religious officers, such as a chaplains corps.⁶⁶

Housing

When Thousands Need A Home - It's A Statistic

A member of the Defense and State Security Committee of the USSR Supreme Soviet described the troop resettlement situation in July 1990 as "disastrous."⁶⁷ Somewhere from 200,000⁶⁸ to 300,000⁶⁹ military families need better living conditions. Among that number are 173,000 families on housing request lists. About 25,000 military families are in the process of immediate return to the Soviet Union from Czechoslovakia and Hungary; concurrently, at a slightly slower pace, 63,000 families are leaving East Germany.⁷⁰ The approximate sum of 90,000 families does not seem too alarming, given the fact that the Ministry of Defense builds about 70,000 new apartment units per year in the Soviet Union. What is alarming is that there has been little prior planning for the returning soldiers.⁷¹ Further, other problems have complicated the housing situation.

In connection with the announced 500,000 troop reduction, 110,000 have been assigned to reserve status.⁷² These reserves need housing as well. Since there is a severe housing shortage, about 85,000 of these 110,000 families have not left the military camps to which they were previously assigned.⁷³ Each year 95,000 new military families enter the force with their own housing needs. Many of the new families

will have the longest wait for adequate housing. Finally, the army needs to house approximately 40,000 families per year that rotate from one assignment to another.⁷⁴

Each year about 70,000 military men qualify to retire. Most have families and are entitled to occupy an apartment provided in the republic in which they choose to live.⁷⁵ In these localities there is a similar lack of housing; thus another "backing-up" of families takes place. Current estimates note that the USSR immediately needs from 16,000⁷⁶ to 24,500⁷⁷ apartments.

In Belorussia the last families displaced by the nuclear reactor accident in Chernobyl are not yet in government-provided housing. About 112,000 of those families still need homes.⁷⁸ Rumors persist among the Soviet units stationed throughout Eastern Europe that Soviet forces may be required to occupy housing within the danger zone of the Chernobyl accident if they are one of the units designated to return to Belorussia.⁷⁹

In Moscow, currently about 10,500 families are waiting for state-provided housing, but Moscow has only allocated the construction of about 16 apartments for next year!⁸⁰ Even if there were adequate money to support the construction effort, there is a disastrous shortage of building materials throughout the country.⁸¹

A member of the Supreme Soviet who investigated these difficulties in July concluded that the main reason for the

enormous problems in the republics is the evasiveness of local authorities. He noted that sites that had been earlier assigned for building homes for families of servicemen have been taken back. Work has practically stopped at sites where housing construction had already begun.⁸² The Defense Ministry is said to be taking measures to solve the housing problem by using its own construction resources. However, its representative states that "the scale of the operations is so vast that we cannot possibly do the job on our own."⁸³

At the same time, the Chief of the USSR Defense Ministry's Main Billeting and Maintenance Directorate promises that "no family of any officer or warrant officer returning home from Hungary or Czechoslovakia will be left without a roof over its head."⁸⁴ A roof indeed! These dwellings back in the Soviet Union have been referred to as "prefabricated huts." Dozens of accounts lament that servicemen returning home are not properly supplied with housing and other amenities.⁸⁵

Descriptive accounts from Izvestiya include this report of a deputy regimental commander:

Out of 300 families in the regiment only 18 have an apartment back in the Soviet Union. And, of those, more than one-half have apartments in closed military camps (in far out locations). People have no great desire to go home.⁸⁶

The commander of Southern Group of Forces asserts that:

Those officers and warrant officers with apartments in the Soviet Union, numbering around 6,000, will return home; those without accommodation but with close relatives can send their families to live with them and register temporarily so as to obtain coupons for meat, sugar, and detergents.⁸⁷

When You And Your Family Need A Home - It's A Tragedy!

Individual case histories confirm this housing disaster. Consider the family of a lieutenant colonel who has spent more than 20 years in the army. He is retiring on pension soon, but he hasn't found himself an apartment yet. The officer has two children: an 11 year-old daughter and a 17 year-old son. Both are about to finish school. He needs a place to live!⁸⁸

A military couple from Leningrad has tried to live with parents in that city. This couple has children as well. However, those grandchildren do not have a permit to live with the grandparents. Due to a breach in existing legal requirements, the Leningrad City Soviet refused to let the officer join a housing cooperative!⁸⁹

Then consider the case of a soldier stationed in Eastern Europe who does have an apartment he can use when he returns with his unit to the USSR. He is an Azerbaijani but, due to his wife's ethnic background, neither he or his wife can return to

their apartment in Azerbaijan. Nor can his son (who has recently completed his service) return and use the apartment of his parents. Following long military service, this couple has achieved refugee status in their own country!⁹⁰

Large families face the most acute problems. One regiment has 18 of them. Some have three children, some have four. None of these families has housing.⁹¹ In the meantime, these families are "temporarily" housed in hostels, hotels, as well as existing military quarters. For the rest a number of barracks, headquarters buildings, and training facilities have been converted into makeshift hostels. Some families reside in prefabricated hostels. The head of the Defense Ministry estimates that fifty percent of the homeless are thus quartered: thirty percent have returned to apartments reserved for them in far-off locations, and twenty percent rent from the private sector.⁹²

The Promise Of Housing In The 13th Five-Year Plan

For the future, says Army Colonel General N. Gryaznov, Chief of the USSR Defense Ministry's Main Billeting and Maintenance Directorate,

We are resolving our problems by increasing the volume of construction. The plan for commissioning housing for the USSR Defense

Ministry as a whole has been met by 100.8 percent this year. It is planned to commission 24 million square meters of housing in the 13th five-year plan period.

He goes on to forecast that:

A total of 19 million square meters will be built by military construction workers and five million square meters by contract organizations of the union⁹³ republics and construction ministries.

Recall that the military construction units are already experiencing a severe crisis. Moreover, the painful reality of future plans and promises is that the work will require money. Obviously, the Soviet economy is also in a crisis.

Economy

Today the most immediate task of the entire Soviet central government is to determine how it will successfully deal with its two most pressing economic headaches: the budget deficit and the consumer goods deficient.⁹⁴ Any number of analysts liken the economically desperate conditions of today with those in 1917, when the nation was ripe for the Bolshevik Revolution.⁹⁵

Until there are dramatic cuts in the military budget, there is little hope of finding the resources to begin to

attack the consumer shortage appropriately.⁹⁶ How large is the military budget? Soviet accounting methods and habits of reporting such critical data make it very difficult indeed to answer this basic question.⁹⁷ It appears that up until now prices paid by the Soviet Union for its military hardware have been kept artificially low. Poor profits and certain losses suffered by military plants were probably compensated for by state loans, which themselves have not been repaid. Some costs have not been announced in military budgets. Further, consider the artificially low prices of commodities, which is another form of state subsidy.⁹⁸ It is likely that the fiscal costs of the military have been and are still so widely diffused throughout the Soviet economy that it is nearly impossible to recognize what the true military budget is or ever was.⁹⁹

This contrived system may provide yet another element of catastrophe when it is brought into the full light of a market-based economic system. The Soviet response to a decline in the output of products left the nation compelled to expand the printing of currency.¹⁰⁰ As a result of this and other factors, the Soviet inflation rate has increased. Well publicized shortages of goods (such as sugar and detergents) were replaced with other shortages, such as fabrics and footwear. Products began to dwindle. Further shortages have been noted in cigarettes, razor blades, and pencils.¹⁰¹

At present we are witnessing a weakening of Soviet labor discipline, which is manifested by mass strikes and a decline of worker attendance on the job.¹⁰² The military is linked to these immense economic problems. The Soviet Union can no longer afford to commit 18% (or whatever the precise amount may be) of its national income to defense. It is taking steps to wean itself from being an economy that relies heavily on creating military products. By necessity, the current system may be replaced with a contract system of business within the military establishment.¹⁰³

As Soviet soldiers depart from East Europe today, numerous opportunities for successful employment are becoming available to them in the very regions they are leaving. Budapest's markets have recently been flooded by Soviet citizens traveling there to purchase needed goods. The exodus became so profound that the Soviet Union recently placed limits on how many may travel there.¹⁰⁴

In August 1990 the Polish border was closed due to an enormously high level of Soviet smuggling. Soviet citizens were attempting to capitalize on price differences, availability of certain products at one place and not the other, and currency differences.¹⁰⁵

During the November 8, 1990, NBC Nightly News, a video account of the economic plight of the Soviet military in Berlin was especially poignant. That telecast reported that the

people of East Berlin were fast discarding their belongings in order to purchase better products manufactured in the West. As the report ended, the camera focused on the Berlin dump. A lonely Soviet officer scavenged about in the dump. Catching view of the camera, he covered his face and raced away. In yet another shot, young Soviet soldiers raced to get out of the view of the camera.¹⁰⁶

A Soviet economist nicely sums up the situation:

Given higher prices for consumer goods and services, the problem of social protection for officers, warrant officers, workers and employees of the Soviet Army will become particularly acute. The fixed nature of their incomes and lack of opportunities to seek additional sources of income for maintaining the necessary standard of living will require that (their leaders make special) arrangements for indexing their pay. Peculiarities of the area of posting, job opportunities for family members, availability of housing, and many other factors should also be taken into account.¹⁰⁷

Without doubt, the rank and file of the Soviet military are enduring considerable hardship because of their vulnerable situation in an unstable economy.

Politics

Today, a political struggle centers around the Soviet military. That struggle is playing out among political leaders

in the news, in the streets, and in the bureaucracies of the Soviet Union.

In fact, there are probably at least three overriding military-political issues: 1. Will the army be able to stabilize the possible political fragmentation in the country, which could evolve into extremist camps and even national anarchy? 2. Will the army continue to serve as a "quick fix" labor force for the various ministries and departments? 3. Will the military continue to be viewed by international leaders as a dominant force for maintaining Soviet prestige as a world power?¹⁰⁸

An Instrument Of Stability Or A Target For New Leaders

Political leaders in the republics all the way down to the lowest levels in the cities probably perceive that they can now wield a certain amount of power -- sufficient to make themselves felt by the central government. In June 1990, the leader of the Soviet Armed Forces, Marshal Yazov, mentioned that "Anticonstitutional acts are undertaken to provoke rejection of military service and encourage desertion. A boycott of the USSR law on universal military service has been organized."¹⁰⁹

In the same month a deputy chief of the USSR Armed Forces General Staff mentioned that:

Difficulties in daily life are artificially created for officers' families and discriminatory restrictions are introduced in the exchange of coupons for food and industrial goods, in registration for housing that has already been allocated, in medical services, and in the provision of employment. Inflammatory calls for a clash with the military are heard at meetings. And as we know from events in Armenia, these calls are followed by direct armed actions against the army and internal troops, which often lead to a tragic outcome.¹¹⁰

If the political leaders in the republics perceive that their ultimate goal is independence, a nearly perfect dichotomy will develop between the interests of those leaders and the leaders of the central government. Furthermore, the military's continued strength or future weakness may determine how the country will be governed.

Located between those two camps was the 1990 spring draft. For the first time, it took place on the basis of a new USSR Council of Ministers resolution. Instead of being implemented by order of the Defense Minister, with local authorities having no special authority other than as representatives to the draft commissions, the draft was fundamentally changed: the various local authorities were directly involved in the draft.¹¹¹

Demands have begun circulating that the army should be separated into ethnic barracks, that men should serve near their homes, and that troops should be fairly compensated

instead of being used as an easy source of labor. There were also direct calls for burning draft papers -- for people to use any ploy to avoid service.¹¹²

Attacks on the draft mechanism appear aimed at the most vulnerable aspect of the military because most attempts to persuade servicemen to desert have been fruitless.¹¹³ On the other hand, when the local governments failed to take legal action against those who avoided the draft, a paralysis began to set in. Political leaders operating in their own localities were influenced by the voices and the acts of those who live nearby.¹¹⁴

Krasnaya Zvezda offered a colorful description of regional resistance to the 1990 draft:

The news from the country's regions reads like reports from theaters of combat operations. An illumination rocket flare was fired at a window of the military commissariat (a draft center) in Siauliai, Lithuania, during the night of April 8th, a fire started and considerable material damage was caused at the military commissariat. A group of unknown persons attacked the Tartu City Military Commissariat in the evening of April 23d, none of the attackers was detained. The military commissariat sign in the city of Rapla, Estonia was torn down and broken to pieces April 24th. The building of the Pasvalskiy Rayon Military Commissariat in Lithuania was picketed for two weeks running, with draftees being threatened that their homes would be burned down unless they refuse to serve in the Soviet Army. Military commissariats were also picketed in the cities of Lvov, Stryy, Ivano-Frankovsk, and others.¹¹⁵

Organizations with names such as "Geneva-49," "League of Citizens of Georgia," and "Fiery Cross" are all active in the anti-army campaign.¹¹⁶

Some regional leaders urge that these same potential draftees be formed into national armies in the republics. The dialogue seems to have moved from calls for men not to answer the draft, to calls for riotous behavior, to requests to form new paramilitary formations. The most disturbing reports claim some advocates now look forward to direct opposition to the army.¹¹⁷

An Instant Labor Force Or The Menace To A Free Market System

Many in the USSR believe that the Soviet military assumes part of the responsibility for the nation's seeming inability to move readily to a free market system. With many divisions on active duty at any given time, the military is called upon nearly every year to take part in the harvests and to labor on countless construction projects. Entrepreneurs are unable to calculate the expenses they will have to bear in a free market system if civilian-owned farming companies go it alone. Moreover, a sort of farming malaise seems to have developed over the last 30 years. Farmers have produced less and less, and more and more of the crops have turned to waste. A sort of

"let George do it" attitude prevails on a grand scale. In this case, "George" is the military. Thus, the army is resented for doing what has traditionally been regarded as a noble chore.¹¹⁸

Motor transport units are widely used during harvests. During 1989, they transported over 26 million tons of products. The soldiers seem to sense that this is not a particularly soldierly duty. They have begun to question the legality of using motor transport battalions for the harvests.¹¹⁹ When a number of soldiers went home without permission during last year's harvest, the military procurator felt unable to prefer charges due to the lack of a legal requirement for the military to provide these units.¹²⁰

The plight of the construction organizations offers another example of the military taking part in an ostensibly noble cause. Again, this military contribution serves to undermine the existence of a skilled labor group in the civilian sector -- one that serves the country's building needs.¹²¹

Likewise, some critics denigrate the military for having taken part in relief operations during the Chernobyl nuclear power accident and the terrible earthquake that hit Armenia. The complaint again charges that soldiers undermined a skilled civilian sector in a free market system. Yet, these two disasters do not appear to be the same as harvests and construction. Arguments opposing use of the military for

disaster relief do not have the same merit as those opposing use of the military for more routine, traditional labor.¹²²

An International Offensive Giant Or A Domestic Defensive Midget

Despite the Soviets' current problems, the international military and political power of a nation with nearly two hundred divisions and advanced nuclear capabilities cannot be scoffed at. Then what may be scoffed at? Old line soldiers and political leaders lament that the great military power of just a few years ago is being reduced.

During the recent 28th CPSU Congress, held in the summer of 1990, speakers were allowed to address the leadership of the Party on a variety of subjects. A general was reported to have stated that the so-called successes of Soviet diplomacy have resulted in the USSR being expelled from East European countries without a fight.¹²³

This Congress was said to be under the influence of powerful neo-Stalinist forces in the army, the KGB, and the apparatus of functionaries who have banded together to attack President Gorbachev and his perestroika. The President and his policies have been blamed for everything: for an excessive disarmament of the Soviet Army, for indifference at the

collapse of the old regimes in East Europe where he refused to send in Soviet tanks, and now for allowing Germany to unite instead of blocking the process by means of military pressure.¹²⁴

Leaving Czechoslovakia

In Czechoslovakia the two Soviet tank divisions and three motorized rifle divisions, fielding upwards of 1,455 tanks, are scheduled for withdrawal by the end of July 1991¹²⁵ or by the end of February 1991, if the Soviet Union's ambitious new goal is met.¹²⁶ This withdrawal goes on around the clock at an average daily pace of five outbound trains carrying troops, hardware, arms, material, and families back to the Soviet Union.¹²⁷

The two governments dispute the value of Soviet installations. Rent previously paid for the leased facilities is a source of further dispute.¹²⁸ Each side has its own assessment. The Soviet Union estimates the value of military facilities in Czechoslovakia to be worth about R1.6 billion; the Czechs are concerned with the expense of having to pay for environmental and other damages that could equal or exceed the value of the Soviet property.¹²⁹

The senior Soviet commander in Czechoslovakia also cites discipline as a problem.¹³⁰ Although he does not expound further, there are reports of problems with the Soviet

soldiers: citizens in one city have complained about burglaries as well as other offenses.¹³¹

Ecological problems were also vaguely discussed by the senior Soviet commander.¹³² The Soviets have been accused of maintaining an unsupervised fuel depot in a protected water area, of destroying 400 hectares of forest, and of badly polluting the Lucna river.¹³³

Asked if the departing Soviets feel a certain amount of disillusionment and disappointment, their commander says, "Yes, quite ... (the Soviet forces) have grasped that although they do not bear any personal responsibility for all this, they are uninvited and therefore unwanted guests in the country." Commenting on his soldiers' hardships, he further says "for the time being it will be necessary to live in confined circumstances. One room per family... (the Soviet military) know they will have to cope with a certain amount of deprivation."¹³⁴

To lessen that deprivation, in June 1990 a Czechoslovakian Federal Assembly Deputy, M. Kocab, expressed his intention to promote delivery of portable housing to the Soviet Union to accommodate 100,000 members of the families of servicemen leaving the country.¹³⁵

Nonetheless, these are especially unwelcome times for the Soviet military in Czechoslovakia. In some cities signs proclaim "Soviets, it's already time" and "It's 2,000 Km to

Moscow." Likewise, there are reports of insults directed at the troops and their families, insults directed at Soviet graves and monuments, and stores that refuse to serve Soviet citizens!¹³⁶

Leaving East Germany

Plotting The Very End Of World War II

In East Germany the Soviet military once had 11 tank divisions and eight motorized divisions capable of massing 7,880 tanks.¹³⁷ These 380,000 Soviet military, along with their 200,000 family members,¹³⁸ are now scheduled to depart by the middle of 1994.¹³⁹ Soviet troops may actually leave sooner, according to former German Democratic Republic Defense Minister Rainer Eppelman. In August 1990, he speculated that the Soviet military could be gone as early as the end of 1992. Eppelman cited the increasing gap between Soviet soldiers and German citizens in the economic and social sphere to support his optimistic prediction.¹⁴⁰

Nowhere in Europe than in East Germany is the Soviet military more exposed to the stark differences between East and West. They are witnessing economic, political, social, and military changes taking place in that recently reunited country. Nor is there any other government more committed than

Germany to ensuring that the Soviet military departs in an atmosphere of cooperation and conciliation.

In East Germany, the presence of Soviet troops has been consistent with the four powers' commitments after World War II. Distrust of Germany and caution over its reunification makes a lot of sense to Soviet leaders. In July 1990 Soviet General V. Lobov, Chief of Staff of the Warsaw Treaty countries Joint Armed Forces, advised that "The withdrawal of Soviets and (Americans) from Germany should be linked to the creation of pan-European security structures."¹⁴¹ His comment indicates a desire not only to have the United States militarily removed from its current proximity with the Soviet Union but also to have a means of ensuring that a reunited Germany does not rise to be the dangerous country it has been twice in this century. General Lobov then predictably goes on to say "The return of Soviet military contingents... will take three to four years... due to many factors including the Soviet Union's economic difficulties."¹⁴²

A closer and equally common insight was provided in July 1990 by Major General V. Kazachenko, commander of the Western Group of Soviet Forces, when he told interviewers that "the length of the Soviet military stay in East Germany depends first on the results of the Vienna negotiations..., which means we will only keep three of our armies, or 195,000 troops in the territory of the GDR."¹⁴³

Discipline Slips

The economic and social "gap" referred to by Mr. Eppelman may be increasing much more dramatically than any Soviet leader could have ever predicted. Desertions and reports of ill will between the Soviet soldiers and local people are reported daily. In August 1990 Pravda mentioned eight deserters from the Soviet Forces who had entered the Federal Republic of Germany and warned that the problem of deserters could become "scary."¹⁴⁴ In September 1990 General Varennikov, Soviet deputy defense minister and commander-in-chief of the Soviet Ground Forces, admitted that Soviet soldiers have lately deserted from the German Democratic Republic to the Federal Republic of Germany due to "low morals" and "misconceptions" of the easy life in the West.¹⁴⁵ After 100 Soviet soldiers were reported as deserters in the first 23 days of September 1990, reports indicated that orders were given to the Soviet military to shoot at deserters.¹⁴⁶ Since then, the Soviet military has taken steps to minimize desertions -- a problem that probably is now as "scary" as predicted in August.

The watchful eye of the Western press has yielded alarming revelations about the Soviet military presence in East Germany. The openness of the German press enables these accounts to spread quickly throughout the world. Responding to reports of

the Soviet military having some 30,000 tons of poison gas stored in East Germany,¹⁴⁷ the German magazine Der Spiegel reported alarming accounts of Soviet activities in East Germany: "Soviet servicemen have devastated one-fifth of German Democratic Republic territory with bombs, shells, tank tracks, and sapper shovels -- learning of forthcoming exercises, residents living in the vicinity of ranges drop everything to hide in basements, afraid they may come under bombardment." The magazine says that since 1983 almost all the dwellings in a Stulpe city street have been damaged by shell and bomb fragments. Disdainful of witnesses, the occupying forces brazenly commit excesses against the environment, destroying all living things around them.¹⁴⁸ In short, the Germans find the Soviet presence a nightmare.

The withdrawal of Soviet forces undoubtedly affects the soldiers attitudes toward their military duties. They know that their current mission is phasing out. They are being paid in local hard currency,¹⁴⁹ so they are more interested in consuming than soldiering. Further, they increase their buying power by stealing and marketing Soviet military equipment, including firearms. Discipline is breaking down. They will soon return home to an uncertain future.

Reports state that in East Germany Soviet soldiers are physically attacked with increasing frequency. Some have been fired upon! Soviets there are reported to be in a profound

crisis. Some cite lack of discipline, rising crime, drinking bouts, brawls, break-ins, and poaching. Black marketeering also flourishes. In front of the 200 barracks in East Germany, Soviet soldiers sell caps, gun belts, and even weapons!¹⁵⁰ At one location in East Germany a barracks was fired upon from a motorcycle and a Soviet soldier was killed. In Neuruppin, a Soviet military patrol was beaten to such a degree that the entire patrol had to be hospitalized.¹⁵¹

Nonetheless, the thought of returning to the Soviet Union is not so welcome. In August 1990 Soviet soldiers near Magdeburg were reported striking in protest against their planned return to the Soviet Union. One woman spoke of her fear of returning to the Soviet Caucasus: "It would be terrible. There are bound to be no apartments, schools, and playgrounds for the children. We'll have to live in tents, and the winter is coming."¹⁵²

Strategic Security Problems

The life of the Soviet military in East Germany is also complicated by the mechanism of reunification and the traditional duties and roles carried out by East German soldiers. The East-West German borders once controlled by East German soldiers now must be entrusted to Soviet troops.¹⁵³ Classified material applicable to the Warsaw Pact Organization

must now be kept away from the eyes of long-time Soviet allies.¹⁵⁴ The difficulty of security is also complicated by reunification. There was a fear as early as July 1990 that when East Germany joined West Germany, the West would obtain sophisticated Soviet equipment such as the MiG-29.¹⁵⁵

Paying Generously To Remove An Old Foe

The generous attitude of the government of the Federal Republic of Germany is helping to solve Soviet problems in Germany. In June 1990, the Germans offered mutually acceptable financial conditions for the Soviets departure from East Germany.¹⁵⁶ The agreement provided pay and allowances of the Soviet soldiers to be issued in West German marks -- a so-called hard currency. Immediately following the elation that greeted this settlement -- on the first day of the economic reunion of Germany -- prices for basic foodstuffs in the stores doubled!¹⁵⁷ Prices may well continue to increase in Germany as the reunified nation attempts to assimilate East Germany. At least the Soviets have a stipend that helps them during the economic crisis. The Washington Post recently reported the allowance: "A Soviet colonel still based in Germany collects his salary in rubles, plus food and necessities, plus a new monthly stipend of 1,250 German marks, \$833 - after taxes, paid by the reunified German government."¹⁵⁸ The Soviet officer

who provided the example went on to admit "Of course it's financially advantageous to be abroad."¹⁵⁹

German financial generosity goes beyond paying the Soviet soldiers remaining in East Germany. The Federal Republic of Germany also agreed to assist the Soviet Union in implementing the civil housing construction program in the European part of the USSR for withdrawn Soviet troops.¹⁶⁰ This measure, which will cost about \$5.2 billion, provides work by German construction workers -- probably Yugoslavian and Turkish construction workers as well -- all of whom have a good reputation for engineering. They will erect approximately 63,000 family apartments and quarters for 13,000 unmarried officers in eight different Soviet military districts. All work will be done with Western materials and technology.¹⁶¹

Leaving Hungary

Selling Off The Property

During the height of the Cold War, Hungary was home to two tank divisions and two motorized rifle divisions of the Soviet Army. Additional fighting and support units rounded out a force that once could field about 1,270 tanks. By the end of June 1991, all of these forces will be withdrawn.¹⁶²

Today the biggest single issue of concern for the Soviet military in Hungary is negotiation concerning compensation from the Hungarian Republic for the value of the military cantonments, residential housing, first class airdromes, and much else that is being handed over. Property of the USSR left behind in Hungary includes 363 houses, 14,000 flats, hospitals, schools, holiday homes, six large airdromes, depots for 220,000 tons of fuel, garages for motor vehicles, 149 barracks, and 66 canteens. Soviet officials estimate that these facilities are worth about R2.7 billion.¹⁶³ Izvestiya reports that:

Two hundred and sixty trains with gasoline, kerosine, diesel fuel, other petroleum oils and lubricants, and military property, which the Hungarian side promised to buy from the Soviet military or help them sell, stand frozen on sidings, scattered among storehouses, warehouses, and storage tanks...more than a hundred thousand tons of such goods!¹⁶⁴

The value of the property is difficult to estimate -- especially the value of the real estate. Hungarians allege that by European standards the facilities are outmoded and useless. Even if this is true, Soviet officials believe the property has some recognized value.¹⁶⁵ Hungarian officials persistently claim they will pay only for buildings which they intend to use; they do not intend to pay the real estate value of the installations. Some Hungarian experts like to cite the

internationally accepted convention of Roman law: "everything which has been built ought to share the fate of the master of the land." Translated: Hungary does not pay anything!¹⁶⁶

Soviet military officials bitterly respond that their country must pay twice to house the same soldiers: once in Hungary and next in the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁷

Some reports indicate that many Soviet installations were plundered when the Soviet forces departed; thus, the appropriate value of those installations can no longer be agreed upon.¹⁶⁸ These problems have led Soviet commanders to leave guards posted in some areas as the main forces departed,¹⁶⁹ to dismantle parts of some facilities for the possible use of those very same building materials back in the Soviet Union,¹⁷⁰ and to blackmail local communities with ultimatum-like threats to pay for the property or else see the property plundered.¹⁷¹

In May 1990 the "Evening News" in Budapest reported "The Hungarian Democratic Forum deputy stated that the commanders of the military installation in the village of Tab are demanding five million forints in exchange for not demolishing the general foodstore, school and nursery school belonging to the barracks." That same interview alluded to "similar cases" elsewhere.¹⁷²

The entire matter presents a dilemma: Hungary does not have potential buyers for the facilities. Current economic

conditions in both countries are poor. Even if compensation were forthcoming, it would be diverted from the pressing Soviet military housing needs through the various Soviet ministries.

Despite all of these problems, Hungary and the Soviet Union agreed upon a protocol in October 1990 which points out that:

The Soviet side is ready to compensate for the damage done to the environment, but wants experts to objectively study the extent of the damage. A particularly important point is the possibility of setting up joint enterprises to use former military facilities.¹⁷³

Images Of A Guest Too Long

On the streets of Budapest a poster has appeared that responds to the Soviet troop withdrawal. It depicts the back side of an unattractive military head with a caption in both Russian and Hungarian: "Comrades, The End."¹⁷⁴

Reports claim Soviet soldiers are selling their weapons to earn extra money¹⁷⁵ and cite incidents of unexploded, potentially dangerous shells left behind near military installations.¹⁷⁶ Also, border traffic was suspended in August 1990 after a massive influx of Soviet citizens. Budapest radio estimates that "In the wake of earlier liberalizations, eight million people, mostly Soviet citizens, crossed the Hungarian-Soviet border in one and a half

years."¹⁷⁷ Hungarian taxi drivers have offered to help. They have offered to take the Soviets free of charge back to the border!¹⁷⁸

Leaving Poland

In Poland one Soviet Tank division and one Soviet motorized rifle division account for a mere 694 tanks.¹⁷⁹ The number of Soviet soldiers in Poland is small in comparison with those in the other three countries. A total of 58,000 troops stationed there in 1989 will be drawn down to 50,000 by the end of 1990.¹⁸⁰ All Soviet soldiers in Poland will be withdrawn by 1995.¹⁸¹

The main difference between Poland and the other localities where Soviets are departing is the historic nature of Poland. This buffer country has always been caught between the conflicts of Germany and Russia. Thus, a reunified Germany is not really a very pleasant thought to most Poles, because being caught in the middle of two military powers once again is not a welcome circumstance.

For this reason and probably because the Soviet numbers are rather small, the new Polish government is not in as much of a hurry to see the Soviets depart as are the new leaders in Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Hungary. In March 1990 Polish Prime Minister T. Mazowiecki expressed a view probably shared

with Polands newly elected president, Lech Walesa as well:

The (Soviet) troops will probably have to be withdrawn after a while, but we take a realistic view of the situation on the basis of the prospect of German unification and so we are not raising this problem now.¹⁸²

Even though many Poles are reported to feel indifferent to Soviets and their continued presence in Poland,¹⁸³ there are many reports of Polish people dismantling and also desecrating Soviet monuments and graves. In September 1990 Pravda noted:

In Poland the graves of Soviet soldiers who fell during the liberation of that country are being desecrated. Nor is there any shortage of them in Polish soil: more than 600,000. Monuments to V.I. Lenin by whose decree Poland was granted its independence in 1918 are being removed. Groups of rampaging thugs attack the Soviet diplomatic representations in Krakow and Gdansk. In Sopot, young people make a show of burning Russian language textbooks. The names of streets and squares connected with the Soviet Union are being changed in Polish towns.¹⁸⁴

These anti-Soviet activities indicate that the times seem right for the withdrawal of Soviet soldiers from Poland.

Considerations For The West

To determine where the Soviet military will relocate in their homeland, Marshal Yazov says that strategic aspects of the decision have taken a "back seat:" priority was given to the economic and sociopolitical situation in the country. Western experts watch as the units return to determine exact locations and strengths. Marshal Yazov further says:

Divisions of the Central Group of Forces will go to the Moscow Military District - Gorkiy, Sormovo, Kursk, and Shuya - the Baltic Military District, and the cities of Kaliningard Oblast... Most Southern Group units will go to Belorussia and the Ukraine, near Lugansk, Cherkassy and Dnepropetrovsk... Much of the aviation will be sent to the North, Siberia, and Turkestan.¹⁸⁵

From all of these reports, Westerners should conclude that the Soviet military is leaving Eastern Europe rather quickly and that this is period of crisis for the Soviet military. It is also a period of crisis for the entire Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, the Soviet units will be deployed close enough to central Europe that they can be reintroduced into that region in a mere two or three days. The prophecy of the future, taken in view of the lessons of the past, was recently offered by John Mearsheimer:

The conditions that have made for decades of peace in the West are fast disappearing, as

Europe prepares to return to the multipolar system that, between 1648 and 1945, bred one destructive conflict after another. Then, too, the Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe hardly guarantees a permanent exit. Indeed, the Russian presence in Eastern Europe has surged and ebbed repeatedly over the past few centuries. In a grave warning, a member of President Mikhail Gorbachev's negotiating team at a recent Washington summit said, 'You have the same explosive mixture you had in Germany in the 1930s. The humiliation of a great power. Economic troubles. The rise of nationalism. You should not underestimate the danger.'¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

The history of Russia and the Soviet Union is filled with accounts of success over hardships which are little imagined by most in the West. This is the same nation that bore the brunt of World War II, with 27 million casualties. Its people cast off the great Napoleon and, nearly four hundred years before, defeated the Tatars. The Soviet military may be returning to their home in a period of crisis, but it is probably not correct to access that they are a defeated military.

ENDNOTES

- 1 D. Yazov, (Marshal), "Interview Before The 28th CPSU Congress: Responsibility For The Motherland's Fate," Pravda, 27 June 1990, 2d Edition, p. 5, in FBIS-SOV-90-124, 27 June 1990, p. 69.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid., p. 68.
- 4 M. Antyasov, "Eastern Europe: Times of Change," Izvestiya, 31 July 1990, Morning Edition, p. 5, in FBIS-SOV-90-149, 2 August 1990, p. 18.
- 5 Ibid.
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